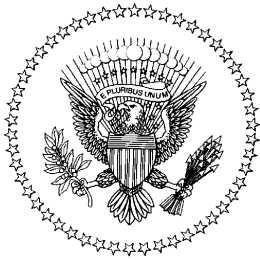


Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, May 24, 1999
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Week Ending Friday, May 21, 1999

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Seattle, Washington

May 14, 1999

Thank you. I couldn't help but thinking when Jack was up here talking and saying all those wonderful things, that Joe Andrew had just said that we would win every election in 2000, from dog catcher to President. And my immediate reaction was, that's not such a great distance. *[Laughter]* That's because I spend too much time in Washington—*[laughter]*—now, when I'm in Seattle, it feels great.

Let me first of all say how grateful I am that the Governor and the mayor are here. Thank you both for coming. Our State party chair; your former mayor and my good friend, Norm Rice, and his fine wife. I thank our officers for coming out here to Washington. And Jack, to you and Ron, my long-time friend, and Ted and Ben and the others who are here who have helped so much—Mr. Marshall and others, I thank you all.

I was thinking when I got on the airplane today—you know, when a politician tells you a true story, your immediate reaction is, it couldn't be true—*[laughter]*—but this is a true story. The first time I ever came to Washington, when I was running for President in 1992, I came rather late. I'd been out there running for quite some time, and I was nervous as a cat. And I knew that Senator Tsongas had been here a lot and had built a lot of support. And I really wanted to make a good impression and there was this event planned and we had a very nice crowd.

And I came into the airport in my modest little plane, and, coincidentally, the Seattle police force, under Mayor Rice, who has been trying to pay me back ever since—*[laughter]*—they were practicing how to provide security and rapid transportation to dignitaries. So here I arrived, you know, as

President Bush used to say, a Governor of a small Southern State—*[laughter]*—in an airplane not quite as grand as the Boeing I fly in today. *[Laughter]* And I look up—I swear, there were more than 50 motorcycle police officers there. *[Laughter]*

And we go, and you know, I know how MacArthur felt with his ticker tape parade in New York City now at the end of the war. And we're going in, you know, and I've got this little two-car motorcade—*[laughter]*—and 50 motorcycles. I mean, I couldn't breathe. I thought, my God, there won't be a person in this town that votes for me. *[Laughter]* And sure enough, I lost the primary in Washington State. *[Laughter]* And I've often thought it was because of those—it was quite a grand thing, you know. I don't have 50 motorcycles today when I go anywhere. *[Laughter]*

But the Seattle police were well-trained and they've always been very polite to me, and I never will forget it, though. Every time I land on the tarmac, I get a little nervous. *[Laughter]*

Let me seriously say the people of Washington State have been very good to Hillary and me and the Vice President, to our administration, in two elections, in 1992 and 1996. We suffered a terrible setback here in the congressional elections in 1994, and then made up a great deal of ground in 1996 and 1998. And I think we will more than make up the rest of the ground in the year 2000, thanks to people like you.

I would like to just—you know, I just made myself a few notes here on the way in. Sometimes I don't even do that. But I've got some things—I don't get to come here as much as I'd like, and I would like to say a few things.

When I made the long trip out here the first time in 1992, I did so with some mixed feelings, because I had a job I loved in a place I loved and my family was doing well and things were going great for us. But I was

very concerned that our country was drifting and divided, that we had all kinds of problems and that no one seemed to be offering a clear vision about what kind of country we were going to be in the 21st century and how we proposed to get there.

And I had in my own mind a very simple idea of the world I wanted our daughter to grow up to live in. I wanted 21st century America to be a place where there was opportunity for every responsible citizen, where we were joined together, across all the lines that divide us, into an American community united by our common humanity and where my country was still the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity.

In short, I wanted to find a way to take advantage of the two great things that are happening in the world today: the explosion of technology and the increasing interdependence of people across national lines, both of which are perfectly embodied in this room, in this city, and in this State, in a way that would give everybody a chance to participate in it and give us a chance to let go of the problems that besiege us.

And it seemed to me in order to do that we had to move beyond the old political debate in Washington. And so I went around the country saying, "I believe if we're committed to opportunity and responsibility and community and to being a 21st century democracy, then we have to find a way to reward entrepreneurship and build the middle class and help the poor work themselves into it. I believe we have to find a way to grow the economy and protect the environment.

"I believe we have to find a way to help people succeed at work and at home, because everybody's most important work is still raising good children. I believe that we have to find a way to reform welfare that requires able-bodied people who can work, to work; but doesn't require them to sacrifice their responsibilities as parents because they can't afford child care or health care.

"I believe we have to find a way to reduce the crime rate, not simply by better enforcement but also by better prevention. I believe that we have to find a way not only to increase the quantity but the quality of education. I believe we can expand trade and lift the environmental and labor standards of

the world instead of driving them lower. I believe that we can be a force for peace in the world and still be willing to use force if it is the only way to achieve legitimate, indeed, compelling objectives."

I believed all that. I also believed that we could do it with a Government that was markedly smaller, but more active, if we focused on what a 21st century mission would be. And for me, it is overwhelmingly the mission of establishing the conditions and then giving people the tools to solve their own problems, but not alone—working together.

Now, all the work that those of us in our administration have done in the last 6 years has been a labor of love to try to take those basic ideas and make them real, working facts of life in America. And I am profoundly grateful for the results. I literally get up and try to live with the spirit of gratitude every day for the good things that many of you have played a large role in bringing to our country: the longest peacetime expansion in our history, over 18 million new jobs, the lowest minority unemployment rate we have ever recorded, welfare rolls about half of what they were before, a 25-year low in the crime rate, the highest homeownership in history, over 90 percent of our children immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time ever, dramatic progress in the quality of our air and water, more land set aside in perpetuity under this administration than under any administration in the history of the country except those of Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt.

We're almost there with our goal of hooking up all our classrooms to the Internet by the year 2000. We have now over 1,000 and will soon have 3,000 charter schools, which I think are the most exciting new innovation in public education. There was one when I became President. We have 100,000 young people who have now served in AmeriCorps, serving their communities as service volunteers. It took us 4 years to get to 100,000; it took the Peace Corps 20 years to get to 100,000 volunteers.

I am grateful for the work we've been able to do in the world to help our friends when they're in trouble, to try to reform the global financial system, to be a force for peace from

Northern Ireland to the Middle East to Bosnia and now in Kosovo. And I am grateful that I had the chance to serve in this job at this time to bring these changes and for the role our Government had, as well as for the role all of you and others like you all across America had.

But I am here today to tell you that the important thing is the ideas—the ideas. If we had the right ideas rooted in the right vision and we had the right attitude about our work, then we can continue that.

You know, I won't be on the ballot in 2000. It's the first time in a long time I haven't been on a ballot. But it is terribly important to me that everyone in America understand that this, on the one hand, didn't happen by accident, but on the other hand, is not dependent upon any person alone, including the President. What matters is that we have the right ideas based on the right vision, and that we have the right attitude about our work.

There was a wonderful article in "The Christian Science Monitor" in the last couple of days, which pointed out that even though I have had what some people might characterize as a fairly tumultuous 6½ years—[laughter]—I had enjoyed more stability in my Cabinet and senior staff than most other Presidents have. There is a reason for that. The people that work on our team know why they're there. They're not there to occupy offices or sit at certain places behind certain name cards at tables or wonder who is leaking on whom in the paper the next morning. They're there because they passionately believe in what we are doing, and they understand that this is a job. It is not about political positioning; it's about putting the people of this country first and having a vision of where you want to go, having guiding ideas, and making them real. That's why I'm here. That's what I want you to understand.

When somebody asks you why you were here today, tell them it's because you like what happened in the last 6 years; we've got a lot more to do, and the vision and the operating ideas of the Democratic Party should continue to guide the United States of America. That is what I believe.

We've got a lot of things to do. We've got to deal with the aging of America. We've got

to deal with Social Security and Medicare and long-term care, and people have to be able to save more for their own retirement. We have to continue to tend to the world economy, and I badly want to prevail in my argument that we must use this surplus in a way that both deals with the aging of America and pays down the debt of the country.

My plan, in 17 years, would give us a debt that's the smallest percentage of our economy we've had since before World War I broke out. And that means lower interest rates, less dependence on foreign capital, higher investment, higher growth, more opportunities for people in high-tech havens like this and in small rural towns like those I represented for so many years. It's very important.

We still haven't come to grips with all the challenges of education. We cannot pretend that we can be the country we want to be until we can offer a world-class education, not just in our universities but in our kindergarten through 12th grades, to all Americans. We still haven't done everything we have to do to help people balance work and family by a long shot. We need to do more with child care; we need to do more with family leave; we need to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights. We have a lot of things we have to do.

We have big environmental challenges. Several of you discussed environmental issues with me today. I'm very proud of the livability initiative we have, to try to bring environmental issues into the practical lives of people in urban communities; and the lands legacy issue we have, to try to add more lands to the permanent legacy of the United States. And I will continue to try to persuade my friends in the other party in Washington, DC, that the crisis of climate change is a real issue that demands a real response from the United States, and that we cannot expect others to do their part unless we're ready to do ours.

But the most important issues we have, I would argue—and if we get this right; the rest of it will work out all right; people in this room will solve half the problems that are out there—the most important thing we have to decide is what kind of country we

are going to be. In the last several days, couple of weeks, the headlines have been dominated by two pieces of sobering news—notwithstanding the Dow going to 11,000 and having 18¼ million jobs and all of that. One, of course, was the tragic killings in Littleton; the other is the ongoing conflict in Kosovo.

I would like to just say a couple of words about that, kind of picking up on what Ron said. I talked with Hillary for a long, long time about what happened in Littleton. And we had a family conversation about it, too. And we talked with Al and Tipper Gore about it, because they've worked on a lot of these cultural and family issues for years.

And then I talked with people all around America. I have to tell you, I do not believe that there is a single thing for us to do; I think there are a lot of big things for us all to do. When we had our meeting Monday to say that we're going to have a national campaign against violence against children, Pam Eakes was there, and I want to thank her for the wonderful work she's done with Mothers Against Violence.

I think that you have to understand that we live in a world where there are a lot of people who are alone even when they're in a crowd, where there are a lot of children who never knew they were the most important person to anyone. And when you have large numbers of vulnerable people, then things that other people can't imagine would be problems can be big problems. So if it's easier for a kid in America to get an assault weapon, whereas it's impossible in most other countries, and you have a higher percentage of vulnerable, disconnected kids, more bad things will happen. If it is easier for a child in America to play an interactive video game where you score by how many innocent people you kill, and you have more vulnerable kids, then it's more likely to have a bad impact.

If we have 300 studies now which show that hours and hours and hours a week after years and years and years of watching sustained, indiscriminate violence makes young people less sensitive to violence and to its consequences, if there are a larger number of disconnected kids, then it will have a more destructive impact than in other countries.

So all of us—not pointing the finger at anybody—we've got something to do to rebuild this web of support to build that village that Hillary always talks about it takes to raise a child. There are things for families to do, things for schools to do, things for communities to do, things for the gun industry to do, things for the entertainment industry to do, things for Congress to do.

I hope Congress finally, next week, will get around to passing that bill that closes the loophole on background checks for gun sales at gun shows. They did pass yesterday, in the Senate bills, to raise the age of handgun ownership to 21 and to close the loophole in the assault weapons ban, which has allowed the sale of large ammunition clips if they're imported since 1994. They voted for that, and I applaud them.

But we need to pass all these common-sense measures. We've moved a long way since we had Democrats from Washington State losing elections in 1994 because they voted for the crime bill, with the assault weapons ban, and the Brady bill. We've come a long way. The voters in Florida—not exactly a raving liberal State—voted 72 percent to close the gun show loophole on the ballot. So we're moving in the right direction.

But I don't want to see our attempts to save our children turn into chapter 57 of America's ongoing culture war for someone's political advantage. What I want to see is to see every single segment of our society stand up and say not, "It's someone else's fault," but, "What can I do?" And let's work through it.

How we deal with this issue—you know, we had all those school killings last year. We did a lot of things. We sent out these wonderful handbooks to every school in the country, and they're very, very good. And people were horrified by it, but somehow, when Littleton happened, I think it finally, like, broke a dam in the psyche of America. I think finally people said, "My goodness, this really can happen anywhere."

And we cannot—we owe it to those families and those children who perished not to let this opportunity pass from us. And not to let it disintegrate into finger pointing. Everybody needs to just stand up and say, "Okay, what can I do?"